

Commission Members,

2 years ago, I took it upon myself to ban telemarketers from my life. I have done the following actions to accomplish this.

1. Disconnect my home phone.

At the time I made this decision, I was receiving up to 10 calls per day from telemarketers, almost none of which were available on my Caller ID system. I had not given my phone number out to ANY agencies or companies at this time; all of these calls were random or calls for the previous owner. My answering machine was filled with hang-up calls, and the phone would ring hourly from 8am until 9pm.

To date, I have received zero telemarketing calls, due to the disconnected line. Judging from the volume of calls I had up to that point, I have successfully blocked more than 2,000 calls to my home.

2. Purchase a cellular phone for my communications needs.

By law, telemarketers are not allowed to call cellular phones. I have not received any telemarketing calls to my cellular number since its purchase in April of 1999. However, with the proliferation of the telemarketing industry and the threat of lost revenue, I cannot guarantee that companies will not flaunt the law and call the number anyway. My guess is that telemarketing firms will begin to call cellular phones and pay off the consumers that complain. After all, a few hundred dollar fines for each instance is considered the cost of doing business for some companies.

3. Refuse to give out my phone number to any organization, with the exception of my bank and hospital/doctor's office.

Although many companies tout their 'privacy policy' with regard to my phone number, it is just a thinly veiled legal step that allows them to sell my number to any other company, only after they establish a 'relationship' with them. Correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't there recent legislation up for a vote to ban this practice? I'm sure it failed. Telemarketers want to sell their info, even if people rarely buy anything. I've been careful to keep my real number a secret. I've gone to such extremes to remove my phone number from my checks, my office directory, my high school and college alumni records, and even my own website. So far, it seems to have been effective.

However, with all my secretive practices, who knows what I've missed? Have friends tried to contact me, only to be thwarted by a fake number, email address and postal address? Can I continue to count on the safety of my information with my bank and my doctor's office? What keeps them from selling my phone number to telemarketers?

So, I have a few suggestions for the Commission.

1. Increase the fines for calling cellular phones to \$5000 per occurrence.
2. Publish information about telemarketing companies that break your rules
3. Make a nationwide, permanent "opt-in" database for those who wish to receive offers over the phone. I guarantee you the 3 people that sign up will be happy.

Thank you,
Ben Johnson